



ACCOUNTABILITY BRIEF

December, 2000

Issues Impacting the Condition of Education in Nevada

Nevada is committed to higher achievement standards in education, more rigorous statewide academic examinations, and greater school accountability measures. Key accomplishments and efforts by the Nevada Department of Education to improve the state of education in Nevada from June 1, 1999, to December 1, 2000, are reviewed in the recently released *Superintendent's Report to the Governor and Legislature: 1999-2000*. The document covers major new and ongoing programs in the areas of school accountability, academic standards, statewide proficiency testing, charter schools, statewide automated student records, occupational education and school-to careers, alternative education, adult basic education, English language learners, technology, special education, early childhood education, textbooks, nutrition and health, school safety and student discipline, licensing of educational personnel, and other areas of concern. Representative lists of workshops, conferences, regulations, and publications also are provided. The scope of activities is beyond review in this brief, and copies of the document are available upon request. The present brief summarizes various issues that impact the current condition of education in Nevada.

For the last decade and a half, Nevada's student growth rate has maintained an annual average increase of between six and eight percent, far surpassing national growth rates. Although many districts saw a decrease in students over the past year, Nevada rates were still a high 4.7 percent. Accompanying this growth was a two-dollar per pupil decline in basic guaranteed support from 1999-2000 to 2000-2001. Nevada was ranked 36th among states in a funding adequacy comparison in the *Digest of Education Statistics 1999*.

Included in this growth are large increases in racial/ethnic minority student populations, with a growth rate of over 500 percent in the last decade. In FY99, for example, there were 34,202 students with limited English proficiency served by local school districts in the state. Statewide norm-referenced testing and the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination indicate a large performance gap between white and Asian students and African-American, American Indian, and Hispanic students in the tested academic areas.

On governance in education at the state level, there is a fragmented structure comprised of a number of commissions, committees, boards, and councils, each with responsibility for only a narrow portion of the K-12 system and none under the control or authority of the State Board of Education. Further, over one-half of Department staff members are paid for by federal funds and are engaged in overseeing federal concerns. While increases in federal programs have led to increases in federally funded staff, growth in the number and scope of state funded programs in recent years has not been accompanied by sufficient administrative funds to adequately staff the Department of Education in overseeing the state's concerns.

Dealing with the growth, ensuring adequate funding, closing the performance gap, and bringing coherence to the K-12 governance structure are major issues that deserve consideration in efforts to improve education in Nevada.

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